



Benjamin General C.E.

BENJAMIN DENSMORE'S JOURNAL OF AN EXPEDITION ON THE FRONTIER¹

RED WING Dec 20 1857

DANIEL DENSMORE Esqr

Dear Brother—Your epistle of the 22^d ult seems yet to be specially answered by giving in detail an account of my tour to the north-west last fall. I presume you are aware of the fact that I made the tour, that it was prolonged into the wintry season, that though begun auspiciously it terminated with a smack

¹ This document was written by Benjamin Densmore shortly after his return from a trip to Otter Tail Lake, then on the extreme frontier of settlement in Minnesota. Although in the form of a letter, most of it appears to have been copied from a journal kept during the expedition. The original manuscript in the possession of Mr. Densmore's family was loaned to the Minnesota Historical Society in 1918, through the courtesy of his daughter, Miss Frances Densmore, and a photostatic copy of it was made for the society's manuscript collection. Additional Densmore Papers including three survey notebooks, maps of the projected towns of Newport, Red River Falls, and Otter Tail City, and many plats of early township surveys have been presented to the society. These papers and especially the letter here printed convey to the modern reader some conception of the hardships endured by the men who literally made the map of Minnesota. Technical knowledge alone was insufficient for them; this had to be supplemented by the sturdy qualities of the pioneer. Indeed, the surveyors who located so many Minnesota towns, permanent and ephemeral, were the forerunners even of the pioneer settlers; only explorers and fur-traders preceded them. The document has been printed *verbatim et literatim*, but standard punctuation marks have been substituted for the dashes used in the original. The notes have been prepared by Miss Dorothy A. Heinemann and Miss Bertha L. Heilbron of the staff of the Minnesota Historical Society.—Ed.

Benjamin Densmore belonged to a family of pioneers who moved toward the Mississippi as the population in the eastern regions became more dense. His father, Orrin Densmore, a citizen of New Hampshire by birth, settled in Riga, New York, in the first decade of the nineteenth century. It was here that he married Elizabeth Fowle and that Benjamin was born in 1831. Sixteen years later the Densmores again became frontiersmen, this time moving onto a farm near Janesville, Wisconsin. Soon thereafter Benjamin began alternately to teach

of the unromantic and unpoetical, a taste of the trials of famine and of hardship. Yet you have not had an account giving the full gist and pith of the tramp with its exciting events, its beautiful scenery, the novelties which were constantly met with on our way and the "modus operandi" adopted in selecting our route through a region hitherto unexplored by us and through which loaded wagons and teams had not been known to pass.

school and to attend Beloit College from which he graduated in 1852. Upon his return to Janesville he became engaged in the construction of the Janesville and Fond du Lac Railroad. His father was one of three commissioners appointed by the governor of Wisconsin to appraise the value of the property of this road. This was Benjamin Densmore's entrance into a field which soon led him to Minnesota. In 1855 he was entrusted by the Minnesota and Northwestern Railroad Company with the survey of that part of the road extending from St. Paul to St. Anthony and thence to Stillwater and Taylor's Falls, and a year later he became chief engineer for the survey for the same company of the region from St. Anthony to Kettle River and from that point northward toward Duluth. Benjamin's brother Daniel accompanied him to Minnesota in 1855 and in 1857 the family home was moved to Red Wing in Goodhue County, where the father engaged in the lumber business. Benjamin, however, continued his surveying work in various parts of Minnesota. During March and April, 1857, he surveyed the site of Bloomington on the Minnesota River, and, when this work was completed, he undertook an expedition for the Echota and Marion Land Company, one of the numerous firms operating in Minnesota land at the time. During the month of May Densmore marked out the sites of Echota and Marion in Otter Tail County and then penetrated as far as Fergus Falls or, as he called it, "Red River Falls." In the fall of the same year he returned to the Otter Tail region with Charles W. Iddings of St. Paul to station men on the town sites already located and surveyed. This second journey is the subject of the letter here published. Upon the outbreak of the Civil War Densmore enlisted with the Third Minnesota Volunteer Infantry and at the close of the war he was serving as captain of the Fourth United States Heavy Artillery (Colored). Returning to Red Wing in 1866 he assisted in the founding of the Red Wing Iron Works, with which he was connected until two years before his death on January 26, 1913. Densmore Papers in the possession of the Densmore family and the Minnesota Historical Society; Albert N. Marquis, *Book of Minnesotans*, 123 (Chicago, 1907); Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, *History of Dakota and Goodhue Counties, Minnesota*, 2:757 (Chicago, 1910); Minnesota, *Special Laws*, 1858, p. 431; *Red Wing Republican* (weekly), January 29, 1913.

Oct. 5/57.² Leaving Saint Paul our route for an hundred miles lay on the east side of the Mississippi river and over a comparatively level country. As the upper Mississippi is quite well settled we have been passing farm-houses and through towns thus far, frequently, selecting our camp-grounds each night at some place where wood and water are near the road. At this place (Little Falls) we cross the river and take the road to Long Prairie twenty-eight miles west of Little Falls. West of the river the face of the country along our route is made up of very high ridges bordering the flat sandy bottoms of Swan River along which our route lays for several miles.

Oct 10 We have now entered an unsettled district two miles west from the Mississippi, on our right forests of pine, rugged and hilly, on our left and before us, the sandy plain with its scanty herbage yet thickly bedded and matted in places with wild strawberry vines. Still farther to the left the river with its tortuous windings, while beyond a weary waste of single oaks, fire brush, poplar wind-falls and a blue fall-sky away in the south. At noon reached the first crossing of the river. Those of the party in advance of the teams have already lighted the fire to cook coffee for dinner, and while we are waiting for the others to come up with the teams I will relate to you our plans, object &c.

The main object of this expedition is to station men on the town-sites, Echota and Marion, which I surveyed and located on the Otter Tail Lake and River last Spring (in May).³ We propose to reach the Lake Via of Long Prairie, hoping to find a feasible and direct route through from the latter place. We have

² This date and the one at the beginning of the following paragraph have been inserted in pencil. The handwriting appears to be the same as that of the rest of the manuscript.

³ Marion and Echota were incorporated as towns by an act of the legislature of June 11, 1858, which located the former at the southwestern end of Otter Tail Lake north of the Otter Tail River (Red River) and the latter at the foot of Truth Lake. The first town officials of Marion as prescribed by the act of incorporation included B. Densmore as president. This probably accounts for the fact that his name is found in the census of Otter Tail County taken in 1860. Although Densmore left members of his party at both Echota and Marion the towns failed to develop beyond the stage of incorporation. Echota is shown on Sewall and Iddings map of 1860; Marion seems to have disappeared even at that early date. Prob-

two teams laden with supplies and outfits for the expedition and for the men who are to remain. Six of our number will compose the two parties, one to be stationed at each town. Two teamsters, M^r C. W. Iddings of Saint Paul, who has consented to assist in exploring the route through, and your humble scribe make up the party.⁴

Toward the middle of the afternoon we recrossed Swan River, after which our route crossed over hills and through valleys irrespective of grade or direction. The wagons being heavily loaded the mules became exhausted of their wonted zeal from tugging at the steep hills and through stony coolies until dusk when on reaching a last summit to the westward of which lay another valley-plain, our modern jehus signified their determination to proceed no farther. Thus we encamped at the summit of a high hill with this inconvenience, that water could be seen to the southward at Swan Lake, to the westward in the valley, but in either direction the intervening distance was a perfect network of brush and brambles; by using great patience we finally succeeded in procuring enough from the valley for supper.

During the evening the heavens blackened up with moist looking clouds which seemed each to wend his own way and that quickly; the men sat about the camp fire as usual but evincing a spirit of restlessness, remarking now of the surrounding country, now of the aspect of the heavens and frequently drawing nearer the fire as a chilling breeze would rise from the valley and sweep the exposed summit where we were camped. Again the winds had gone down, the clouds ran as ever disclosing at intervals an opening into the dark blue heavens beyond. Faintly

ably neither town ever had inhabitants other than those left by the Densmore party. John W. Mason, *History of Otter Tail County*, 1:82-87 (Indianapolis, 1916); Minnesota, *House Journal*, 1858, p. 656; *Special Laws*, 1858, p. 431.

⁴ Charles W. Iddings was a surveyor living over the post office in St. Paul in 1856. After the Densmore expedition he was associated with Joseph S. Sewall of St. Paul, the engineer who built the Wabasha Street bridge. During this connection the two men published a map of Minnesota which is known as the Sewall and Iddings map of 1860. There is some evidence that Iddings was a resident of Otter Tail County for a time, for he too is listed in the census of 1860. Andrew Keiller, *St. Paul City Directory for 1856-1857*, 110; Mason, *Otter Tail County*, 1:82, 87.

but distinct the screech owl is heard over the valley and beyond what seems the confines of darkness. Then all is still.

Among a troop of adventurers like this it is seldom there is not one who is deputied chief musician. Silence had not lasted long when ours broke forth whistling some sweet remembrance of a once favorite melody; he was followed by another and then another, each in his own strain and after his own thoughts until the whole party (save one of the jehus, a phragmatic [*sic*] dutchman) as though unmindful each of what the other did were engaged in this simple passtime. Soon the resonant night air was filled with soft notes floating as softly away into the dusky thickets when "Boys stop whistling or you'll bring a storm" broke forth from the lips of one of our number, a sea salt in years past. A few thoughtful moments and the remaining fire-brands were thrown together and each selecting a spot to lie wrapt him in his blanket and lay down to rest a few short moments more and we thought no more of the sailor's warning nor of the world, but slept and dreamed.

Yet the clouds thickened and betimes assumed a more direct move and ere the golden hours of night were yet announced, a stray drop of rain dropped among the dying embers, then another and another, then myriads, and the storm came down, wakening a sleeper from his couch in the thicket, one from the hill-side, another from the trench in the wagon path where his posture had too effectually checked the escape of the rushing flood down to the valley below. A general melee arose throughout the camp of surprised sleepers. Some sought shelter under the wagons, others were striving to unfold and spread the mammoth canvass. This sheltered us for a time though we had to endure the remainder of the night in wet clothes and wet blankets despite our best endeavors to find shelter, such was the copious deluge of rain water.

About nine oclock the next morning the storm beat away followed by a frizzling rain for an hour. When the rain had fully abated we dried our outfits as well as could be and at noon set out for Long Prairie.

Long Prairie River and Prairie Lake take their name from the prairie which is long, as the name implies; it extends along

the river from twenty to thirty miles and is quite narrow, averaging about a mile in width at its widest parts. We are disappointed however in the appearance of the country north-west of here and toward Otter Tail Lake (the direction we wish to go) for it seems to be quite densely wooded where, from the best we could learn from Government Surveyors, we had supposed we should find an open prairie country.

Long Prairie, some two years since was the Indian Agency for the Winnebago indians. Since then, the post has been vacant [*sic*] by the removal of the indians to the Blue Earth River and has been quite uninhabited until the present summer.⁵

The United States built here from fifty to eighty buildings, some of which are good habitable houses, besides mills, store-houses, shops &c at a cost in all of about \$120,000.⁶

Recently the improvements and lands were disposed of to a private company and people have begun to come and take up their residence. Withal, the place has an air of savage life about it that one does not relish; those blockade houses, those picketed yards, one feels fearful lest the decaying timbers tell a tale revolting or cheerless or startling.

After a short time in consultation, Iddings and self resolved to make up our packs and proceed in the direction of Otter Tail Lake one or two days' travel when we could determine whether it would be practicable to attempt getting through with the teams.

⁵ The treaty of 1846 with the Winnebago brought about the removal of that tribe from Iowa to Long Prairie in 1848. Neither the Indians nor the white men who settled near the reservation were content with this arrangement. As a result a new treaty was concluded at Washington on February 27, 1855, according to the terms of which the Indians gave up this reservation for one on the Blue Earth River. United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs, "Report" for 1848 in 30 Congress, 2 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 459 (serial 537); United States, *Statutes at Large*, 9: 878; 10: 1172.

⁶ An account of the building operations in this region during the years 1849 to 1851 can be found in United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs, "Report" for 1850, in 31 Congress, 2 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 101 (serial 595). The government property passed into the hands of the Long Prairie Land Company of Cincinnati soon after the removal of the Indians. Clara K. Fuller, *History of Morrison and Todd Counties, Minnesota*, 1: 217 (Indianapolis, 1915).

And accordingly started out following up the river until night and encamped. The next day at nine oclock A M we came to a bend in the river where we crossed, the river coming from the south and our course being north of west. After traveling through two miles of oak and maple timber began to find tamarac swamp and open marshes; at noon came to a creek which crossed our course at nearly right angles. Continued on until the middle of the afternoon and the tamarac occurring in denser and larger bodies we determined that the route would be utterly impracticable and turned back, reaching the creek again at dusk where we camped for the night returning to Long Prairie the next day.

Our next project was to go south and west from the prairie, following a wagon trail which leads through the timber from the prairie to the plains; once on the plains our object will be to make northward fast as possible & at the first opportunity.

The day following our return, then, we set out on the southern route, having left part of our supplies in charge of the company agent at Long Prairie.

During our sojourn at the prairie we availed ourselves of the kindness of a M^r Bauman, an old indian trader, in his offer of house room where we had very comfortable quarters for men roughing it in the bush as we were. On taking our departure from the prairie the old gent kept our company as guide as far as Little Sauk Lake, within two miles of the plains, where he has a claim and has during the last summer raised a crop of vegetables. Soon as we entered the woods, six miles from the agency the route became rough, with sharp pitches, stumps and sideling and crooked places. So our progress was slow and at night we were yet three miles from the little lake.

The old gentleman shows a great deal of anxiety about his vegetables lest the indians may have destroyed them, particularly his onions; however he kept his patience until the next morning when he walked through to his claim, firstly admonishing us of several springy places in the road near his place. The first of these we reached without difficulty. Our first jehu, probably elated with the success of his animals over the others insisted in going through this without repairs and in so doing upset his load completely. Though without injury other than breaking a travelling companion pertaining to our quasi guide the incident

was a sufficient caution for further procedure. A thorough repair rendered the passage of the second load safe; by cutting half a mile of new road through the brush we avoided the second spring-hole and at noon had reached the claim.

Oh! who that wants or wishes for a "lodge in the vast wilderness,["] let him come here—here, where no honest yeoman would ever see fit to pitch his tent and dig his well. To do credit to the enterprise, however, we must say that the old gentleman has as fine a growth of vegetables as Minnesota soil is capable of producing, mammoth, of first quality and an abundant yield.

It is two miles to the plains from here and we have to cut at least an hundred rods of new road beyond here before we can get along with the teams. After dinner, then, all forces will be sufficiently employed for the rest of the day.

At evening, after a palatable dish of wild duck soup and other etceteras of camp fare our host M^r Bauman held us in audience a good long hour upon a religious discourse wherein he set forth ideas peculiarly native and stubborn arguments; how long he would have talked had we remained attentive we know not for sleep seemed a sweeter restorer to nature than a surfeit of ribald sentiment and he finally wound up preaching to himself for want of listeners.

The next morning and we left the old man with his peck of onions, his monstrous turnips, his undescribable pipe & glory & departed, he to dig his roots, we to steer our way over and through a district of country hitherto unexplored by us and scarcely by civilized man; at 10⁰⁰ A.M descended into the woodland valley, crossed Sauk River and rising from the valley on the western side came out on the broad acres of the unbounded plains; to the right and north distant three miles to five, heavy timber, the head waters of the Long Prairie, & Sauk Rivers. The timber extending away to the western horizon. Westward, "hills peep o'er hills" and abrupt ridges lift thin backs while south west and southward the plains extend away to the limit of vision. We soon found that we had left a shelter in leaving the timber for the winds of the prairie were in high glee and cold. At noon reached a small lake in one of the prairie basins where we halted to refresh the mules,

While this was being done Iddings and self went in advance to look out the route and in due time the party followed taking such a direction as we were able to indicate to them by known signs.

In this manner we continued selecting the route for two or three miles in advance and returning motions until late in the afternoon, when, giving the party directions to encamp at a point of timber still in advance we struck away to the north to discover if there were any possibility of a belt of prairie extending through and beyond the timber.

Before it was yet dark we came to a wide, sluggish and muddy stream coursing eastwardly through the prairie. Thus cut off from further exploration by the probability of miring in an attempt to cross the stream and the stronger possibility of its getting pitch dark before the feat of crossing could be accomplished we abandoned the idea of advancing farther and resorted to climbing the highest tree that could be found near as a station from which to finish our reconnoissance.

From the altitude thus attained sufficient could be seen to demonstrate the entire impossibility of a feasible route to the northward and we turned about and sought our way into camp, skirting timber and marshes, wading through the thick and luxuriant growth of prairie grass and finally, after a seasonable walk in the thick darkness, spied the glimmer of the campfire on our right but separated from us by a watery marsh—this we waded through after tracing its direction some distance, and entered camp quite to the joy and welcome of the party who as yet seem uninitiated in the wild variety of camp-life in the wilds.

What is man's good nature, what is his honest heart, what he is, he himself will feel and know when his tent is pitched miles away from the habitation of man, when darkness of night enwraps his vision, when his sphere of life and life influences is limited to his little troupe of wanderers, is limited to himself.

Such reflex cause elicits the true, the beautiful and the good of man's nature and works to the exclusion of those many artful devices and designs of soul and heart so deeply seated in the teachings and actuations, the sum and pith of civilized life.

Morning came and with it renewed journeyings; found it necessary to retrace our route of yesterday nearly two miles in order to get round the southward of a large marsh, an unforeseen obstacle which detained our onward progress nearly half the forenoon. This surmounted we started westward again passing the point of timber and entering a broad and level prairie, the most beautiful expanse of level prairie I ever gazed upon; it extends northward to the woodlands, westward and in the distance gives place again to the high rolling surface, southward and diversified with groves, doubtless the sylvan surroundings of some prairie embosomed lake.

We had not ventured far on this field when the wagons began to cut the sod and the mules began to mire. We seemed to be crossing a portion of the prairie which acted as a subweir [?] from the south to the north, the dip of the prairie being in that direction. This occasioned us some trouble; one of our teams was evidently failing under their work and for want of proper care. This teamster complained that he had the heaviest load to draw. When we had reached firm ground again a truce was arranged and the entire loading of each wagon changed to the other.

This done and the several mules refreshed meantime by an allowance of grain (our stock of feed was small), we started on, the department of the commissary department giving evidence that the change of tonnage had been to some purpose. About the middle of the after noon our wonted equanimity of wonderment became uncontrollable. Thus far the scenery had been that of the monotonous cast, yet beautiful withal and of a passive grandeur. As we approached the western verge of this plateau and were remarking the high swells of land beyond and noticing several isolated knobs or pinnacles on the south west, our attention was attracted by the noise of waves dashing along the beach; we were approaching one of those beautiful sheets of water which occur so plentifully throughout the west. This lake must measure a mile across its narrowest place; it is surrounded by prairie and lies at the eastern base of the high rolling land; on the north eastern it is separated from another and a very small lake by a narrow ridge or bank of sand &

gravel.⁷ It is rare we find a lake without this bourne of beach material on some part of its shore; it is evident this ridge is formed by the upheaval of ice in the spring and by the action of wind and waves. In many cases this ridge affords the only feasible passage by the lake, it being the barrier between the lake and an impassible marsh which extends away to some marshy district or to the woodlands. To-day we seem travelling through nature's rural districts, a district having all the elements of thrift, of prosperity and, of peace, I might say, still being as it is without the habitation of civilized man.

But I was ambitious to get a view beyond the highlands and sped away fast as legs could carry, reaching the summit of what I thought might be the ridge but to find a valley between me and another summit hill higher;⁸ baffled thus several times I at last reached the real summit—back to the east by the plateau we had been traversing during the day, the bottom of a stupendous basin upon the western rim of which I was now standing, the lake hidden from view by the intervening minor summits I had passed, the party and the wagons, a mere spot near the little lake on the prairie, southward the view extending between two groves and onward and southward over the sweeping plain to infinity, where the earth and sky meet in one undefined horizon. Westward, I find myself standing upon the eastern rim of another huge and mammoth basin encircling and confining in its base another large expanded lake, descending into this basin by minor summits as I had ascended from its eastern “contemporary” I at length obtained a fair view, to northward of its lake.⁹ The height of land there and the prairie extending back from the lake seem to indicate an open prairie country still to the north.

The party and the wagons crossed the summit and reached the lake a few minutes before dark. While they were preparing to encamp Iddings and self followed about the eastern side of the lake to see if it would be practicable for the teams to pass

⁷ Probably Lake Reno, a lake of considerable size on the boundary between Pope and Douglas counties.

⁸ Northwest of Lake Reno an elevation of 1,400 feet is reached.

⁹ Probably Lake Mary, in the southern portion of Douglas County.

that way the next morning since if this could be done it would make our route several miles shorter than to encircle the large body of the lake to the south west of us. At the North East extremity of the lake found one of these ridges (though not wholly perfected) separating the larger lake from a very small lake as before mentioned.

It may be of interest to state that where the lake has no visible outlet the excess of water oozes through or under these ridges and escapes to other lakes, that these lakes in turn have a similar sub-outlet or until the discharge of water is sufficiently great to cut through the ridge and form a running stream. Leaving the lake and entering the wood again we went north until our attention was arrested by the loud cackling of geese and ducks and the rushing noise as they sped over their water in their frolicks; this convinced us that the opening in the timber which we were endeavoring to reach was a lake instead of prairie and abandoning further exploration we turned back satisfied that there was but one alternative—to traverse the large body of the lake to the south west and west and to make northward from the west side if possible.

Returning, found the party snugly encamped, the huge canvass drawn up before a very cheerful fire & each one seemingly occupied with his own thoughts—but what bodes this; while at our supper, numbers of green frogs rushed hopping through the camp, over its occupants, camp-fire and all and reaching the lake plunged beneath its waters; perhaps they were frightened by the camp-fire and by our intrusion, but more probably they anticipated the cold and stormy night-wind and sought the water for warmth.

And surely the night was dark and cold & blustering. The cold wind came from out the north west across the lake and poured in and through our camp most unmercifully; those who suffered most however were the poor feeble mules pitiable creatures, they looked more in the morning like two shrivelled beets than like serviceable animals.

Note We camped last night near a government township corner by which we are able to locate ourselves; it seems that we have got far enough west to be quite if not directly south

of Otter Tail Lake, hence we should make to northward soon and fast as possible.

Despatching the teams to southward around the lake under charge of Iddings, I again followed round to northward taking two of the party with me armed for hunting. At 11⁰⁰ A.M. joined Iddings who was in advance of the teams and had reached the North west side of the lake and from there we took up our north course, the country in that direction bidding fair for some time in travelling. At noon we reached a stream which it was necessary to cross. Jehu N^o 1 as usual preferred to cross without a bridge and to use an appropriate phrase "pitched in" his mules and wagon literally "ploughing the muddy deep" hole. N^o 2 somewhat emulated, would risk his team and load and accordingly pitched in also ditto N^o 1. Finding their animals would become fixed property unless detached from the load they led them out and after severe and combined efforts at the extremity of tongue load N^o 2 succeeded in wading it out to the hard ground. Their determination to draw out N^o 1 in the same manner called forth a short, brief, concise speech of the pie-crust order enforcing the practice of economy of horse-flesh by unloading the floundered wagon before drawing upon it. This soon brought forth the party rule when they pitched in & pitched off the load when a comparatively slight effort brought the wagon out on terra firma. While the mules were waiting the wagon was again loaded and we began the afternoon as though no accident had occurred.

We had gone but a mile or two farther when having reached the northern rim of the grand basin we saw that our progress to northward was again cut off by the timbered districts. After consultation with Iddings he concluded to explore a short distance in the timber while I piloted a route skirting westward along the timber. Wagon traces were numerous and had drawn our close attention since entering the plains. Soon found one of these tending westward which I followed for some distance over hills and down ravines and across marshes until at length it "brought up["] at an old camp ground. Nonplussed and perplexed at this sudden termination of a groundless hope I left the "desolate" looking ashes and by dint of pulling up a sharp ravine we reached the open prairie again; half a mile further

on made an encampment of the party, while I strolled on as usual to explore the route in advance; had been gone but a few minutes when I reached a road leading to the north. This gave renewed hopes of finding a way through the timber and I followed the road until dusk but not long enough to gain any definite idea of its purpose nor termination.

Returning to camp found Iddings there; he had found us again after considerable exertion. Upon relating my discovery soon concluded that the road is one spoken of by a M^r Tuttle of Long Prairie as leading north to some city, some town site.¹⁰ After a long and deliberate "council of war" upon the subject before the camp-fire, we decided it would be prudent to explore the road at least as far as "the city" before taking the teams on, and, that the teams should not be hindered by such an exploration it was further decided to make it in the morning and if possible before 8^o.

Morning dawned and we had already indian like, with each our blanket wrapped about us placed many miles between us and the place where we had slept.

At opening twilight after following the winding route along a hazel valley we came to the "Twa Roads" and being inquisitive of each and both we soon decided each to take a road to follow it up and by a certain time to return again and meet at the forks. By the right hand track we noticed a small stake stating the distance to HOLMES CITY to be three miles.¹¹

¹⁰ W. W. Tuttle was the head of one of the three families living in Long Prairie in 1859. During that year or the year following he moved to West Union. Fuller, *Morrison and Todd Counties*, 1:218, 223.

¹¹ Holmes City was founded by Thomas Holmes, Noah Grant, and W. S. Sanford, all of whom came from Shakopee. As Holmes was the leader of the party his name was given to the settlement. Grant proved his title to a claim; the others, however, were not so successful. Holmes remained in the town only a year or two and then returned to Shakopee. That he was not in Holmes City at the time of Densmore's visit is indicated by the statement of the latter that Holmes had moved west the previous spring. (See *post*, p. 182.) Hence the two men found there by Densmore were probably Grant and Sanford. Although Holmes City is undoubtedly one of the two oldest settlements in Douglas County, most pioneers of the locality and writers up to the present have agreed that Alexandria, founded by the Kinkead brothers in the summer of 1858, was

Divesting us each of our blankets and secreting them nearby in the bushes we set out upon the separate roads with a "much-before-breakfast trot"; had not proceeded far however when we recognized faces somewhat familiar as the "Twa Roads" seemingly confused and afraid to go alone in the woods, met, mingled and ran on as of yore, as one.

Hill, dale and wooded slope seemed no obstacle to our onward tendency and at length a mathematical arrangement of stakes on a rugged side hill inevitably led us to the conclusion that we were entering the suburbs of the city, the stakes indicating in a tangible manner those pieces, parts or parcels of land known and described as being the lot or corner lot of block and conveyed in consideration of dollars per foot per front.

Yes Indeed we were entering the city for we could see the "block corners"; a few minutes' walking indiscriminately through streets and blocks brought us to the nucleus, the heart, the kernel of Holmes City. A good hearty serenade of raps at the cabin door soon brought a response from the sound sleepers within ($8\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$) who lifted their latch and bade us enter. The object of our early tour being answered by the prairie which opened out north of the city, a few cursory questions as to its extent in that direction satisfied us as to the route and we were on our way back to meet and order the teams.

settled first. One historical sketch of the county, however, does contain the statement that some old settlers maintain that the Holmes City party had reached its destination a few weeks before the Kinkeads and that both groups were living on their respective locations by August, 1858. Contrary to these assertions, the dates of the journal here published lead to the conclusion that Holmes City was founded at least nine or ten months before Alexandria. There is even a possibility that the Holmes party selected the site in the spring of 1857, for Densmore later mentions the fact that its members explored the region north of the "city" at that time. (See *post*, p. 182.) On the other hand, in October Densmore did not seem to know of the existence of Holmes City though he had probably passed through the region when he made the survey of the previous May. (See *ante*, p. 168, n. 1.) Thus it is likely that the town was founded sometime between May and October, 1857, probably in the early summer of that year. Constant Larson, *History of Douglas and Grant Counties*, 1: 125, 132, 174, 325 (Indianapolis, 1916); Brown and Wright, *Plat Book of Douglas County*, 5 (Philadelphia, 1886).

Found they had but just halted at the edge of the prairie when we gave them the halloo to come on. Thus our flying reconnoissance was made and our route determined upon while no time was actually lost to the progress of the teams. At noon our small cavalcade reached the "city" in due order where we made a liberal halt. Engaging an ox team and two men (the only civilized and domestic inhabitants of the city) to accompany us two days on our route, the men as guides and the oxen to take a part of our tonnage, we left at three o' Pm and struck out to north upon the prairie.

But a short distance from the cabin is a high swell in the prairie; from this we observed on the northern horizon two prominent points or knobs distant about twelve miles.

When night came we had by dint of surrounding marshy places and crossing streams made a northing of about three miles where we camped. Our reinforcement of men from the "City" were the chief attraction of the evening in relating their yarns of adventure and exploit.

Our days service had been uncommonly long and as soon as quiet was the order about the camp-fire we dropped off in deep slumbers.

By following up the practice of exploring in advance of the teams we saved a great deal of unnecessary travel the next day, though from the nature of prairie country we were sometimes deceived in being unable to judge of ground until having reached it. We are aided much, too, by the information of our guide from the city;—he passed through this same section of country last spring in company with Thos Holmes and remembers, the principal features of timber, prairie, &c when passing. It seems that Holmes's object was to reach Otter Tail Lake, but that after travelling a distance of forty miles in a northerly direction he came to a rough and stony country, studded with small lakes; one lake however, he discribed as being very large; this he thought must be battle Lake, a lake situate within seven miles of Otter Tail Lake & South East.

The character of the country being uninviting as it was, he turned back (our guide informs) on his route until within seven miles of Holmes City and then bore westward.

This information at first non-plussed our calculations as we have estimated the lake to be not more than 25 miles at most, directly north from the city. Canvassing the information as a whole brought us to decide that we were west far enough to be south and perhaps west of south from the lake and that hence our policy to reach the lake must be to go north.

About the middle of the forenoon while Iddings continued in advance I followed the border of a marsh for some distance and then turned toward the route taken by the teams; had reached the top of a hazel brush knoll when a pair of monstrous and excessively fat cows started from the burnt hollow of an oak stub nearby. Our hunters being within hailing distance were soon on hand and dispatched one of the animals on the spot; the other, frightened by the tumult of the dogs and hunters in pursuit, kept beyond reach for a short time but like his fellow chum finally took passage in the wagon as game. At noon halted near a small lake and while dinner was being prepared the men "fell to," skinned the game, some pronouncing in the meantime encomiums upon the virtues of cow's oil, some the warmth of cowskin mittens and shoes and others upon the flavor of the roast in prospect; this latter however they did not relish, the animals were completely enveloped in a sheet of blubber fat which would measure at least two inches in thickness and which rendered their flesh insipid for culinary purposes.

Afternoon our route lay along a beautiful belt of prairie bordered on either side by groves of timber and woods; at 4 o'clock P M crossed a beautiful stream of water which crosses the belt of prairie; half a mile farther north brought us out in full view of the knobs we had noticed from Holmes City.

Since first noticing these knobs we had marked them as a kind of natural observatory whence we should be able to better shape our course for the lake; it was now about half after three o'clock and the knobs though plain to be seen were still some distance off, but Iddings volunteered to visit the summit and gain a view before dark and started off at a rapid pace accompanied by the guide.

I piloted the party & teams along the timber skirting the eastern base of the range until five o'clock and encamped; before dusk attempted a short reconnoissance toward the mountains for

such we had already termed the high knobs as they seemed to form a continuous range.¹² My tour was brief, however, for I soon found that a thickly brushy country spanned the distance yet between me and the nearest summit & I returned to the camp, just after dark. Supper was delayed for some time, owing to the pooriness of the wood gathered about camp and with the expectation too, that Iddings and his comrade would come in in time. Yet he did not arrive as we had expected. Fearing that he might be wandering in the dark two men were despatched to a high knoll to the southward to start a brush-fire for a light and to discharge a gun at intervals. This it seems met his attention though he made no answer to the signal until within a short distance. As they approached the camp-fire and came into the broad light their appearance was truly comical yet partaking of the frightful character. Their clothing torn in places, their hats of the most uncouth shapes, their hair disshevelled and their faces scratched in divers ways and places, Iddings grasping a hunting knife by the hilt with one hand while the other was clenched as if to give a blow, while his companion carried his gun in the position of "make ready."

A moment of astonishment shown by those in camp and all burst into a hearty laugh when the night adventurers confusedly gave their story.

¹² These "mountains" are the Leaf Hills in the southern and eastern portions of Otter Tail County. Although many of the hills are only 1,500 feet above the sea level, at one point they reach an altitude of 1,750 feet. From their highest point the hills gradually slope to the level of Otter Tail Lake which is about 1,300 feet above the sea level.

On the whole Densmore presents an accurate description of the country which he explored. After leaving Long Prairie the party passed through a wilderness of forests and swamps interspersed with patches of open prairie. Lakes were frequently encountered since this district is in the heart of the lake region of Minnesota. Otter Tail County alone includes 1,029 Lakes, the largest being Otter Tail Lake, which is eight miles long and two and a half miles wide, and Battle Lake. The Red River, often called the Otter Tail River between Otter Tail Lake and Breckenridge, is the largest of a number of rivers which flow through or have their sources in this county. A country of "mountains" and prairies, lakes and rivers such as this, is obviously a land of great beauty, a fact which Densmore seems to have fully appreciated. Newton H. Winchell, *Geology of Minnesota*, 4: plate 51 (St. Paul, 1901).

It seems that after they had left the top of the mountains & while crossing the small ridges at its eastern base they were brought to a stand by what they thought to be an animal of the cat kind.

What it might have been they do not know; their only idea of its probable size is from the noise it made going through the bush.

The animal started up before them just as they had reached the top of one of the ridges, and, making a circuit about in the brush came up again a few feet in front of them and stopped. Their wits were now at work as to what course they would take; the first idea was to Stay there till morning. A night spent in camp and plenty to eat, however seemed to take the preference. At this resolve Iddings armed himself with his comrades hunting knife, and, making a track to leeward they left their unknown in its ambush and made pell-mell speed in direction of camp, encountering alike thickets of fire oak, marshes and ponds of water.

The excitement of their pseudo Jonny Gilpin adventure once over and Iddings gave an account of his observations from the top of the mountains. The sun had just touched the western horizon as he reached the summit hence his time and opportunity for a clear and extended view was short; he describes the scenery however as equal to his most sanguine expectations, grand & beautiful; he gained the impression that it would be our best plan to pass over the mountains but did not feel positive enough of the expediency of the move.

Before lying down we had arranged for a second visit to the mountains in the morning before daylight, appointed a time for a signal to cross the mountains and one to continue on the east side, selected a gun from our armory with which to make the signal and made every preparation for an early start.

Hutchinson (the sailor) volunteered to accompany me in this trip, Iddings remaining in camp to act in concert with the appointed signals.

At five A. M. Hutchinson and self set out for the mountain, skirting along the prairie to southward until opposite them then entering the oak openings and ridges and making direct for the peak visited by Iddings. At seven A. M reached the summit, just as the sun's upper limit stood above the eastern horizon.

Already the view was blurred by frosts and fogs in places yet the main features of the scene stood out in bold relief. Miles and miles away in either direction, groves, slips of prairie, lakes, valleys and hills and plains and woodlands made up the exquisite beauty of the scenery and the sun advanced devouring the jewelled frosts and dissipating the night fogs. A chilly north west wind made us regret having left our blankets as we did at the edge of the prairie and we were obliged to use considerable exertion to prevent being numbed.

Ambitious to attain as great an altitude as possible I ascended a scraggy bur oak on the summit but soon found that this extra height was of more trouble than value.

What, with running from one part of the summit to the other, climbing trees, and descending now and then a short distance on the leeward side of the peak to escape the chilly blast I had become convinced that our only route was to cross the mountains before proceeding farther and accordingly at the appointed hour and minute instructed Hutchinson to discharge his gun having it pointed in the direction of the camp; difficulty in getting it off delayed us a few moments yet the signal was understood and after a second discharge a reply signal was fired by Iddings. Feeling now that the teams would be along in due time I directed Hutchinson to return and get the blankets while I visited other peaks of the mountains and selected a route for our passage.

Further observation more thoroughly convinced me that to cross the mountains is our *only* and hence our best route to the lake.

Although the mountains are very prominent in their principal outline as seen from a distance, a good feasible wagon road can be found to cross them on our route, the approach from either side being gradual and through coulees or ravines while the peaks or knobs rise from a hundred to a hundred and thirty feet above on either side.

While "waiting for the wagon," made a delicious repast of hazel-nuts which grow in profuse abundance on the sides of the mountains. They were so abundant that they gave a tinge or color of their own to the scenery wherever they were found. A fire had run through the mountains a few days before we reached them which burned the brush in patches, thus we had hazel-nuts

green, raw, toasted, roasted, browned or baked as we chose. In due time the party approached in charge of the teams; the men too had discovered the feast of nuts so bountifully provided & were discussing the subject with a zeal not to be outvied by coon, bear, or squirrel.

Soon after we had passed the summit several indians crossed our Track; from one of them we gathered the idea, though vague, that Otter Tail Lake was in north direction but could get no idea of how far it was. None of us could "talk indian" but Iddings, and he was on the side of a distant mountain cracking hazel-nuts and looking in size like a grasshopper on the side of a Dutch barn.

After reaching the western part of the slope our progress was slow and tedious, having in many places to skirt along the edge of springy marshes and in many places to cross them. In this the lightest pair of mules bolted frequently, one of them seeming as if ready to go by the board.

About the middle of the after-noon we came to a very large bog with a stream running through it. Iddings directed the teams to go round to the right—the party crossed the bog and began gathering nuts on a bluff beyond.

I endeavored to find the route taken by Iddings but of no avail and turned back to see where the teams had gone; found they had halted on the south side of the stream where it enters the bog. My best teamster had been very surly during the day and extremely unpleasant; he had placed his wagon along side the stream at a little distance. As I approached and saw him peering across from behind the load I called him to cross & come on, supposing at the same time that he had examined the stream to see if it would be possible to cross. He turned his team and as they were approaching the stream I had reached it and saw that though narrow it was without bottom and immediately stopped him, saying that he should not cross before having examined the stream for him-self, but, he refused to look for himself and bluntly stated that he could cross. So, starting up, the mules cautiously felt their way to the edge of the sod and gathered their feet for a spring. You can scarcely imagine the scene that followed: the animals sprung and would have cleared

the opening through which the creek found its way, it being not over twenty inches wide, but the wagon had cut down, in the boggy sod and it held them back, the left mule sinking in the mire hind feet first until he was stopped by his fore-feet catching on the sod; the other mule fortunately did not sink so far.

The teamster saw in a moment the result of his folly and opened his wail of invective upon me, hoping that "I was now satisfied." He had been murmuring for several days (since the grain had all been fed) and thought now (that his mules were not much better than dead ones) that he had made a fix on me. And had it not been that the party was in hailing distance his animals might have died for it was all our united forces could do to get them out. The next move was to bring grass and brush and logs and bridge the "muddy abyss" so that the wagons and the other teams could cross.

In a short time they were all across safe and sound. It required some legislation to get the unfortunate teamster into the traces again and on the route.

The whole occurrence would have been avoided by building a bridge in the first instance but I felt that a teamster who thought so much of his animals would certainly have care not to expose them to such imminent danger.

Had he refused to cross unless I built a bridge for him I should have cried "bravo" and had the bridge built in a few moments. As it was I could feel no compassion for him neither gratitude though he harnessed his animals and followed.

To do thus seemed his only alternative for he frankly told me that he could not possibly find his way back across the mountains.

We followed down the east side of the bog-marsh some distance and then turning eastwardly entered a large "canon" at the north end of which I discovered Iddings beckoning us to come; he stood on the very summit of one of the mountain peaks which head the "canon" and at a distance of half a mile gave the whole valley in which we were travelling an air of wildness, it being with difficulty that I could at first but recognize him as an indian.

The ascent out of the canon or gorge was not abrupt and the teams found no difficulty in making it.

This was the last high peak we had to cross; the level prairie could be seen away to northward for several miles when it seemed diversified with groves. North by north-east the mountainous range could be seen extending to the horizon; westwardly the surface of the country seemed extremely broken, marshes and small lakes occupying the spaces between the ridges. The descent from this last peak was of easy grade and through beautiful white oak openings. At 5½ P M we reached a small stream which here separates the timber from the prairie; this we bridged and finally crossed camping near it on the north side. While the party were preparing the encampment Iddings and self made a short tour out on the prairie in hopes of getting another view to the north but of no avail; our inferior altitude since leaving the mountain had placed us again on the surface of the earth where a very few feet serve to fix the limits of our vision.

We made our encampment on the lee side of a clump of willow bushes; in the center of this clump or grove we found quite a little pasture of grass which had escaped the fire and was yet green. Cutting a path into this forage lagoon we piloted the mules in where they had a fine repast.

Not twenty feet from the camp-fire was a thrifty growth of hazel-brush bearing a plenteous crop of nuts; these too were of the "assorted and prepared" being in all stages of preparedness from the raw fruit to the "done brown," all by the same fire which had swept over the mountains but a few days since.

While "filling the tea-kettle" from the little brook the boys discovered the skeleton remains of a buffalo submerged to the sod in what was once the channel of the stream, the water having since then worn a channel round the obstruction.

Many conjectures were made as to how the poor fellow became thus entrapped yet we were not surprised at the fact since the adventure we had had with the mules that afternoon.

We lingered long around the camp-fire that evening. A spirit of despondency evident with some; Hutchinson ever the same sea brave spirit alike in sunshine and in lowry weather. Others seemingly indifferent of past present and future, rather passive yet ever ready at the word. Our reinforcement from "Holmes

City" give notice that they must turn back to southward in the morning, their anxiety ever increasing for the safety of their cabin and their stacks of hay from the ravaging prairie fire; to engage them for another day was my desire yet they were not inclined to make the agreement and finally sought their saggy couch and slumbered, leaving the question still undecided.

The party was in a full chorus of 8^{va} [*octavo*] and sub-chorus in full variation interluded by the heavy breathing and monotonous cud-grinding of the swarthy bovines, while Iddings and your humble, were again canvassing the prospects of the morrow, the ability of the mules to take the additional load should the oxen be discharged, the probable distance yet to Otter Tail Lake and various other pertinent subjects, at the same time not forgetting to notice the varied and beautiful scenery we had passed through during the day. The exquisite beauty of the rancho where we were encamped, the interchange of meadow-along the brook, with points of timber reaching down from the wooded slope, the light, sweet twitter of the tiny streamlet as it wended its crooked way among the tussocks, around the buffalo bones and down to the little lake below.

The moon adds silver to the crystal star-light, a dense, chill fog rises from the lake reaching up along the meadow toward our camp. A fog, also, came over our vision both optical and mental, and, stupid and sleepy we crawled beneath the blankets and slept.

Entreaty seemed of no avail, yet the guides from the "city" seemed as eager to proceed as to return feeling that a game was on foot for demanding increased pay for any further service I immediately closed the question by ordering their wagon unloaded and paying my indebtedness to them.

Supplying them with a due ration of bread for their return & interchanging well wishes each for a speedy and satisfactory termination of the others tour we set out on our several directions.

The additional load thus given the mules gave the teamsters a dejected air yet every mile of our progress northward over the smooth prairies added convincing proffe that we were wise in having crossed the mountains and that we were not now far from the lake.

As we progressed northward the mountains seemed to sink down to southward, a phenomena which led me to think the country north of the mountains higher than that south.¹³

At noon passed a large lake on our left; rising from the valley of this lake we took our course due north again about 1 o' P M came up in full view of a large lake extending to the right and left "a great distance."¹⁴ So soon as I caught a full view of the north western shore and the land beyond, was firmly impressed that it was a lake I visited while at Otter Tail Lake in May last, and which lies about six miles southeast of Otter Tail Lake. It being doubtful in which direction to surround this lake we ordered a halt and made a rapid tour along the south shore to a high knob about two miles distant. From the summit of this even we were not able to catch a glimpse of Otter Tail yet I was convinced from the disposition of the timber in that direction that my supposition was correct.

The next object was to decide which was the best route to pass the lake, which was soon done.

Iddings volunteered to pilot the route in the direction we had come while I continued around to the west end of the lake and thence northward to obtain more satisfactory information if possible.

On the most southerly point of the beach I noticed a lake to the left and separated from the large lake only by a very narrow and low ridge of sand and gravel supporting a scattered growth of rushes or reeds and in places clumps of willows; further I noticed a place where there were no reeds and the water seemed wetting the sand on the side next the small lake. The

¹³ This must have been an optical illusion since the country slopes continuously northward towards the lakes.

¹⁴ The lake to the left was probably Lake Clitherall, the large lake reached at one o'clock, Battle Lake. (See *post*, p. 199.) From the description of the survey of the southern group of lakes (page 193), it seems that the party camped on East Battle Lake. An eminence of 1,500 feet just south of this lake was probably the "high knob" from which Densmore and his followers tried to catch a glimpse of Otter Tail Lake. A small lake southwest of East Battle Lake corresponds further with Densmore's description. The party probably passed between East and West Battle Lakes on the last lap of their journey to Otter Tail Lake,

ridge on the whole seemed to be formed after the same manner as I have already related.

About half an hour before sundown I had reached a high knoll of land about four miles north of the west end of the lake and was paid for my labor by as fine a view of lake scenery as I have ever witnessed. The object of our indefatigable search peered forth from the forests and groves lying between it and the prairie over which I had been tramping for the last two hours.

And, I stood musing over the scene, the low murmur of Otter Tail Lake could be heard as its tiny waves dashed along the beach before the evening breeze; it made the same low murmur last spring; thus it murmured before the evening breeze years ago and years hence it will murmur on the same, a song of sweet music ever the same though the hopes of those who hear it now will speed away and ever change like those same waves and waters never to know life again, ever the same though time may be and may not be, though the world move up or down and though it be forever a wilderness or become the scene of civilization, ever the same.

But a few minutes of sunlight yet remained & I had several miles of walking to retrace to reach camp. Reached the west end of the lake soon after dark and began carefully picking my way along the shore. About an hour after dark heard the signal gun from the camp but was too far to reply by a halloo.

As I approached that part of the large lake separated from the small one as already related I heard a noise indistinctly as of a rapidly running stream. At first I conjectured it to be the wind rattling the dry reeds in the little lake but as I advanced along the beach the noise became more clear and distinct and soon to my great discomfort, found any further progress barred by a wide torrent-stream pouring from the small lake into the large one.

To go round the small lake with its bordering marshes was unpromising for a night journey; this or to cross the stream were the only alternatives and I adopted the latter. After much trouble a suitable stick for the purpose of a setting pole was found and I ventured in, moved with caution at every step and gained the opposite bank in safety. The current was stronger

than I had anticipated while the depth of the stream was less not exceeding two feet.

Another hour spent between hazel brush and darkness and guided by the signal gun & I found my way into camp much to the gratification of the party who had been apprehensive of my return before morning & much to their satisfaction when they heard my story.

It seems they had looked their way along the south side of the timber along the lake until they reached the small lake I have spoken of when they turned southward, a marsh and stream on their right (west) making it impossible to go in that direction. At dusk they came to the north side of the lake we passed that day at noon and camped.

Two of the party while strolling along the shore of the large lake noticed the place where the water was lipping over the sand from the small lake, and, making a small channel in the sand with their feet the water ran freely into the large lake; this had become the violent stream it was when I crossed it on my return. Content with seeing the little rivulet formed they strolled on, making the circuit of the small lake, and, coming up on the opposite side of the marsh from where the teams were thought their case desperate. It was now near dark and to return the way they came was not to be thought of, so, after searching in vain for a feasible crossing, waded the marshy stream & wended their way into camp.

Our work seemed now accomplished; a few hours would land everything at the foot of Otter Tail Lake.

The next morning Iddings took charge of the teams "en route" while with men of the party I formed a surveying troupe and made a rapid survey of the lake where we had camped, the stream & small lake between it and the large one and finally of the large one & connecting the work by survey with the Otter Tail Lake at its outlet.

We reached the lake with our survey about two hours after the arrival there of the teams.

Though I had much yet to do before turning back toward the Mississippi I felt that the great burden of care and anxiety was now off my hands, that though our future labor would incur fatigue and probably hardships they would be incomparable to

those of plodding over an unexplored route with ill-fed and suffering animals. The party stood the trip heartily and were more robust at the end than when they set out on the journey.

The remainder of the day after two oclock P M was spent in recruiting the teams, in maturing plans for our operations upon the town sites and in looking over the town of "Marion." The inland lake and the Otter Tail Lake and river looked summer old and seedy yet the surroundings woodlands looked as beauteous in the autumn as they did in their spring dress.

Oct 25. Today is Sunday and by unanimous wish is regarded by all the men as a day of rest; for twenty days our energies have been under constant taxation and you can well know with what joy we hail this furlough. Iddings started for the head of the lake to-day, both to put the teams on their homeward route via of Leaf River & Crow Wing & to get an ox team at Otter Tail City¹⁵ to haul our supplies for the party going to Echota which is about sixteen miles below here on the river.

A bath and an afternoon stroll along down the river served me an agreeable passtime for the warm sunny afternoon.

Monday 26. As my work in the Otter Tail River country was various and defined I will copy from my journal for the several days spent there:

All hands except the cook are out in the woods bordering upon the little lake putting up "*the first house in Marion.*"

Iddings returned during the afternoon with a yoke of oxen & wagon. The weather which has been mild for fall begins to threaten coldly.

Tuesday 27. Divided the supply of provisions between the two parties and carried that for Marion across the river, fording the stream just below the lake; this occupied us until three oclock P. M. A cold drizzly rain came on during the forenoon & was

¹⁵ Otter Tail City was situated on the northeastern end of Otter Tail Lake adjoining the mouth of the river and about two miles west of the present village of Otter Tail. During the fifties it was a trading post of considerable importance; it contained the United States land office for the district and one of the two post offices in the county and was the county seat. The land office, however, was moved to Alexandria in 1862, and, after the county seat was moved to Fergus Falls in 1872, the village was soon depopulated. Mason, *Otter Tail County*, 1: 83, 86, 95, 103, 109, 677.

now so disagreeably wet and cold that we postponed our departure for Echota until morning.

Wednes 28. And we found the ground white with snow, a cheerless prospect, it looked so wintry; yet we got as early a start as possible "making tracks" for the south to intersect the route leading down the river from Otter Tail Lake.

As the sun rose the snow gradually melted away and by ten o'clock the whole world looked brave as ever in its sedate autumnal dress. The oxen showed a backward spirit at first by refusing to draw up hill, and our ingenuity was taxed for some proper method of getting them along.

It seems they are from Red River and are accustomed to working singly at a cart, hence their dislike to working together after a more civilized manner.

At noon we came to the foot of a steep hill and the animals bolted; at the same [time] "our man Friday & his dog" way laid a coon. So, with unloading and carrying to the top of the hill, killing the coon which was done in a primitive manner with a club, coaxing the hyperborean bovines to take the empty wagon up & piping to cold lunch generally we passed the small hour of day.

While the oxen were yet at their hay Friday & Sam bethought themselves of a hunt along the road in advance and started off with the free air of adventurers, their minds full of the idea of encountering & being privileged to kill "sans ceremonie" *Game*, their loud talk and noisy walk precluding all possibility of coming within gun shot of any *Game*.

Betimes we started on with the team and crossed ridge, traversed vale and passed lake when not discovering our adventurous huntsmen's tracks along the Trail became alarmed lest they were lost. Loud calls were of no avail for no answer came; again the trail was searched but no tracks of them.

Bidding Iddings go on with the load I turned back at full speed, hallooing at every summit I crossed but no reply. At length reached the top of the hill where we had halted and heard Sam & Friday at a distance talking earnestly of where the road was and where they were. After repeated efforts I succeeded in making them hear me (they were going east fast as they could) and they turned about.

A few words were sufficient to show that they were lost of themselves though—as naturally—they were loth to admit but that “they were only hunting about.”]

At all events the adventure answered a good lesson for them to ruminate over when finally left alone at Echota.

In about an hour we had overtaken the team and finding the road obstructed in many places by fallen trees we “beat to arms[”] to remove them. Beyond, we entered as fine a vale as one ought to wish for. We were travelling along the north side of a clear beautiful lake the south side of which is skirted by heavy timber; the north side is bordered by clear prairie for a few rods back, when white oak openings begin and extend northward up the slope from the lake to the summit about eighty rods distant which is crowned by heavy timber. Throughout this open woods the prairie grass grew rank and thrifty.

Indeed, since leaving the hilly region we crossed at noon, our route lay through “pleasant places” and through peaceful groves. At night we encamped in a ravine near the edge of a prairie and convenient to dry wood and a foraging spot for the cattle. During the evening the “coon” was duly dressed and a portion of the game arranged before the campfire “a la cuisinier,” and gave forth a fragrance pleasant to encounter and which gave promise of a delightful breakfast on the morrow.

Thursday 29 Our route continues beautiful as yesterday, frequently passing through prairie vales which embosom many sparkling crystal lakes and are crowned with woodland groves and slopes.

Near one of these lakes we halted at noon for refreshment. About three oclock P. M we came in full view of the Otter Tail River valley below Echota.

Whatever scenery we have viewed since leaving the Mississippi River, be it as it may, it does not surpass that of the Otter Tail River from the point whence we approached it.

Having entered the valley below Echota we were obliged to leave the route we had been following and turn up the valley. At dusk we reached the south side of a large meadow which extends back from the river and encamped; the oxen were very tired and the prospect of crossing the meadow after dark unfavorable.

Friday 30. At noon reached the heavy poplar woods which border the river at Echota on each side and began "cutting a road leading to the center of the town"; this occupied nearly all the afternoon and at night we had camped down at the foot of Sturgeon rapids, the place or site designed for the "Echota mill power."

Sat 31. The woods resounded to the blows from our axes as we wrought a rude cabin from the forest; heavy logs and a wet drizzling rain were no obstacle to our proceedings though we willingly acknowledged the disagreeableness of the latter. At night we had the body of the cabin complete and material prepared for the roof. A bad cold followed the exposure to the wet cold rain, an event not very encouraging since through neglect my supply of clothing was comparatively light for the season.

Sunday, Nov 1. After giving the party instructions with regard to their work, their treatment of indians should any visit them, the course they should pursue in case the company should not send them a new supply of provisions in time, their mode of living during the winter &c, & wishing them each a goodbye, Iddings and self started down the river to visit the "Red River Falls" distant about ten miles, taking the cattle with us.

It is not necessary to give in detail the events following our departure from Echota and final return to Otter Tail Lake except the object of our visit to the falls as nothing else of note occurred meantime.

While in this country last spring I made a survey of the town of "Red River Falls" for a man at Otter Tail City;¹⁶ he had

¹⁶ Years later Densmore dictated some brief notes on this spring expedition in which he states that in February, 1857, he was employed by a land company, that he took a party of men on an exploring expedition, located the town of Fergus Falls and then returned to St. Paul where he made a map of the town, which at that time he called "Red River Falls." His further statement that in November, 1857, he "took out party and left them at Fergus Falls," contradicts this journal and is obviously a mistake. The man who in all probability actually founded the town was Joseph Whitford. During the winter of 1856-57 he was furnished with an outfit for an expedition to the falls of the Red River by James Fergus of Little Falls. The result was the staking out of the town named in honor of the promoter. Whitford went back to Little Falls, but returned in the spring of 1857 with a team and supplies to make a settlement. Densmore's sur-

made the claim last April under instructions from Iddings who had an equal interest in the same. Our object now was to visit the claim and make the survey more definitely and also make improvements of some possible sort.

Arrived at the place just after sundown and much to my surprise found the claim had been jumped and extensive improvements made thereon, several tons of hay cut, a cabin built, breaking done, &c.

After looking the ground over south of the river and about the Falls we proceeded to find a place for fording.

Before we had found a safe place were hailed by a fellow on the opposite side. At this we changed our tactics (knowing the cabin was inhabited) and taking the oxen from the wagon drove them over requesting our generous patron, as he proved, to capture them when they landed; this done he lead them to his stack-yard and again returned to take us over in his boat.

Iddings showed evident signs of disappointment since the claim was in other hands. The short interim before the boat was brought over afforded us opportunity of concerting our plans of action.

Inasmuch as the intent of our visit would only serve to irritate the present claimant it was decided not to make it known to him, while at the same time we would gather all the information possible relative to his claim title. We preserved our incognizance with success and departed the next morning with prostrate hopes and dejected hopes of "Red River Falls."

Wednesday Nov. 4th We arrived at Marion again last night and this morning began preparations for our return home. Since we failed in gaining conclusive information in regard to a direct route from Long Prairie to Otter Tail Lake by the tour we made from the former place in October we decided to make the complete tour between these two points on our return as we would

vey in the spring seems to have been made during Whitford's absence, and it is reasonable to suppose that the man found there by Densmore and Iddings in November was none other than Joseph Whitford. Densmore Papers including a manuscript map of "Red River Falls" in the library of the Minnesota Historical Society; Mason, *Otter Tail County*, 1:91, 479-483.

not then be obliged to follow a route suitable for wagons & teams. Accordingly Iddings went to work making up bread for the journey while I viewed the site of Marion and gave specific orders to that party for the improvements which they were to make.

At 4⁰⁰ P. M. we were all in readiness with packs on our backs & walking sticks in our hands, and, crossing the river took a due south east course over the prairies toward a prominent peak of the Leaf Mountains. At dusk struck on the north shore of the large lake already in our outward journey as lying south of Otter Tail Lake. (We learn that this is the Battle Lake well known in Indian tradition).

About two miles farther on came to a fisherman's lodge; he was a french halfbreed named Boulanger & as is not unfrequently the case in the north west has taken the other side of the house and rears a three quarter family.¹⁷

From him we got directions to Bongo's lodge, another fisherman still farther east on the lake, and finally, engaged him to convey us thither in his birch bark.

A pleasant ride of an hour and a half over the quiet lake brought us to Bongo's lodge.

Iddings had known him for some time and feeling assured of a good welcome, tapped rudely at the bark door of the lodge with his walking stick. A gruff voice replete with good naturedness came from within the lodge bidding us enter.

Bongo is a negro, large in frame and heart, is intelligent and an agreeable talker. So far you may imagine him an Uncle Tom as pictured by Mrs Harriet B. Stowe; beyond this he has the spirit of the voyageur & pioneer instead of that of the saint.¹⁸

¹⁷ One white and four half-breed families by the name of Bellanger are enumerated in the census of 1860. The name was evidently a common one in this region, since as early as 1838, George Bonga, writing from Leech Lake to William A. Aitkin and the Reverend W. T. Boutwell, mentions the theft of some goods by a certain Bellenger. Letters dated May 18, 1838, in the Sibley Papers; Mason, *Otter Tail County*, 1:86.

¹⁸ Bonga was the name of a family of negro and Indian half-breeds living in the district between Lake Superior and the Otter Tail region during the nineteenth century. They were the descendants of two negroes who were brought to Mackinaw in 1782 as the slaves of Captain Daniel

Bongo came to the north west some forty years since under the employ of the American Fur Company; resided several years about Lake Superior when his propensity for trapping led him into the Otter Tail Lake country where he has lived among the Chippewa indians ever since. Like the fisherman first mentioned he rears a family from the indian side of the house.

But of our reception: A hearty shake of the hand & he bade us be seated upon the mat on the opposite side of the fire; he enquired if we had eaten supper and finding we had not eaten since leaving the lake, directed his squaw wife to prepare something. While this was being done he entertained us with much interest in recounting events and making inquiries about elections & political matters in general, showing an active thought; he also made special inquiry for Hon H. M. Rice—Mr Rice & himself were more or less coworkers in the fur trade. The supper was spread upon a clean cloth on one of the mats and con-

Robertson, the British commandant, and who were freed upon his death. In the "Mackinac Register" for June 25, 1794, the marriage record of "jean Bouga and of jeanne, the former a negro and the latter a negress, both free," appears. Perhaps the most prominent member of the family was George Bonga, a fur-trader who lived on Leech Lake.

As early as 1838 he was actively engaged in the trade with William A. Aitkin. In 1853 the Reverend Solon W. Manney, chaplain of Fort Ripley, visited him, and in the summer of that year Bonga accompanied him on a trip to Otter Tail Lake. The trader returned to Leech Lake, however, for in 1856 he received a visit at that place from Charles E. Flandrau. These visitors found the negro an excellent host. Flandrau mentions the fact that George Bonga and his brother Jack were the only negroes in the neighborhood of Leech Lake. Thus it is possible that the latter was Densmore's host at Battle Lake. Whoever he was, he seems to have had in his hospitality and knowledge of the affairs of the world, some of the qualities of the estimable George. Densmore states that this Bonga also was a fur-trader; hence his connection with Henry M. Rice who was the agent for the Chouteau Fur Company during the early years of his residence in Minnesota. In 1897 it was estimated that about one hundred descendants of Jean Bonga were living around Leech Lake. *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 5: 488; 8: 529; 9: 56, 199; 10: 191; "The Mackinac Register," in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 18: 497; and the following manuscripts in the library of the Minnesota Historical Society: Manney Diary, March 11, 13, 14, June 1, 8, 1853; Bonga to Boutwell, April 1, May 18, June 7, 1838, and Bonga to Aitkin, May 18, June 18, 1838, in the Sibley Papers; Bonga to H. M. Rice, December, 1872, an autobiography, in the Minnesota Miscellany.

sisted of boiled fish & tea, or more simply boiled fish. And Oh! ye Epicures who would know what is good of the genus pisces must make a pilgrimage to Bongo's or some other kindred genius' fishing lodge and submit the affair of preparing a member of the finny tribe for the table to the supervision of his dusky better half. We were not yet strangers to plenty—inured to hunger wherefore the dish was endowed with excellence—the flavor was inherent in the viand itself and we take pride in extolling its sweetness. We took our meal “a la Turc,” reclining or sitting cross legged as seemed convenient.

The cloth removed, the mat next served as our couch; our packs untied & blankets spread out & we were soon in sound slumbers.

Rain began falling during the night which hindered our departure until noon of the next day; after dinner made up our packs again and set out toward the peak of Leaf Mountain noticed from Otter Tail Lake. At night had made about half the distance to it from Bongo's and camped.

The wood was yet wet and damp from the rain & for a time it seemed quite impossible to start a fire. The sky threatened more rain & our time until late in the evening was occupied in constructing a kind of bower for shelter. Then to preparing supper.

Our stock of provisions consisted as follows “to wit” Bread 3 lbs salt pork 1 lb and a small packet of tea. Sufficient quantity, we thought for the journey before us but upon inspection that night looked scanty indeed. So we began with rigid economy making our supper upon a short allowance.

The night passed and the day dawned without a storm. As small an allowance again of our store served for breakfast.

At 10½⁰⁰ reached the summit of the peak, in Leaf Mountains. In every direction from the point the scenery is beautiful. South West a mountainous range sweeping round to west and distant a days travel encircling a rich plateau of prairie and groves of timber & lakes; North, mountainous; North East, a broad expanse of prairie bounded beyond by timber; South East, an immense grey field of poplar brush & fire oak with an occasional clump of trees. At the farther side of this field a high

knob stands alone which being in the direction we wished to go served as a landmark. Again we viewed the scene & then began descending the eastern side of the mountain, fighting our way through the oak fire brush on the ridges & wading the intervening marshes. At noon indulged in eating, each a small biscuit. The brush seemed interminable, turn which way we would to avoid it. When a marsh occurred in our way and led the direction we wished to go we waded along its margin in preference to warping along through the brush; betimes we would come to a lake & were it large or small it seemed invariably to cross our path at right angles & we were obliged to traverse round. During the afternoon came to a soaking water way where we found a thorn apple tree laden with fruit. This was a refreshment we had not looked for & you may picture to yourself the figure we cut for the next quarter hour; Viz two bruins (of the genus homo) devouring wild fruit. But with the apples came thorns, prickly ash of all pretensions meeting and embracing us at every step when we started onward.

The sun set and darkness came & we were still wandering along in search of some lake or pond to encamp by, choosing rather to plod along in the dark than endure thirst over night.

By keeping close watch of the stars we were able to maintain our course; after travelling thus about two hours we came to an opening in the dense brush-wood just large enough for a small marshy pond, a small basin of not more than three rods in diameter where the prim poplars seemed to say we will allow but so much space, there are so many of us here that we are already crowded and can allow no more. Yet the little pool seemed grateful; it reflected back the light of as many stars as could get a peep at it and as truthfully as the broad ocean. That night it cast reflections which I trust it may never cast again, two ragged explorers, hungered and weary.

But of what use; we were now in the heart of the jungle and a retreat was equally practicable in either direction. Excelsior might have been our motto for we were content & grateful with what we had & nursed a strong hope for the morrow.

This little pool suited us and we went gratefully to work preparing a dry place near the edge of the marsh for our bivouac & collecting wood for our camp fire & dry grass for our bed,

We "sat up late" that night repairing our clothing which had become sadly torn and worn coming through the brush, a task made doubly tedious by the loss of all the thread we had been the happy possessors of when we made our halt and further by the loss of two most excellent & substantial knee patches some time since dark.

However, we managed to get up passable amends and the evening came & went again from our "Squatter Sovereignty" temple and not a single beam of gloominess.

The day following our route was more diversified with large trees yet the undergrowth presented as formidable a barrier as the day before.

Before leaving the camp fire we divided the remainder of our provisions into two parts, one for our lunch at noon, the other for our supper, supposing that night would bring us at least within twelve miles of Long Prairie. At 10½⁰⁰ we gained the summit of the knob we had viewed the day before from Leaf Mountain.

We now seemed in the very heart of a creation of dense brushwood, North west the Mountains standing in relief against the sky, the limit in that direction of the mammoth basin we had been traversing; Northward and distant about 3 miles, a prairie which extends away toward Leaf Lakes & nearly parallel with the route we had come; South west several miles distant another prairie, probably the one we had passed over on our outward route. Southward and distant about 5 miles a large lake is seen, apparently surrounded with brush wood of the same kind we were so well acquainted with of late. This lake is probably very extensive, though from the knob it appears like a long belt of silver. Every point of the compass east of the knob is alike, one dreamy expanse of indifferent timber, poplars & fire brush. To the southeast & probably another day's journey a high comb or point of grey timber stood as a landmark, a mark we had observed, we thought, on our tour up the Long Prairie river in October but in this we were disappointed. Concluding our observations from the knob we descended its southeastern slope without so much as a forlorn hope that we might recognize our whereabouts in the next twenty-four hour's travelling. Of only one thing we were at all times certain, that the direction we were

going would, if we continued in it, eventually bring us to the Mississippi river or some of its branches.

For an hour after we left the knob our road was brushy as ever but more interspersed with large trees than before. At noon we came to a large lake in the woods. This gave us renewed courage for we believed we had at last reached the head waters of the Long Prairie River, the heavy timber at the same time indicating a route ahead less obstructed by brush.¹⁹

After resting a while on the bank of the lake and quenching our thirst with its waters we started Southward along the shore (this lake is quite two miles long & like the small pond like lakes of the poplar field, we struck it at about the same distance from either extremity) and at the south end crossed its outlet. Here our "expectation stood on stilts"; the question arose, "Is not this the little stream we camped upon in October?" The scenery appeared familiar to us, the stream was of the same volume & general appearance & even the points of tamarac standing out in the marsh which the stream ran through reminded us of the camp wood we cut that night. Hope led our fancy in picturing matters thus familiarly & had everything been equally true we should have been within twelve miles of our journey's end at dark.

The remainder of the day was spent in travelling through a desolate waste of larch windfalls and poplar windfalls, burnt districts, tamarac swamps & water marshes.

Toward dusk the timber began to assume a more thrifty & hardy appearance, the ground descending gradually as we went along and before night had fallen upon us we came to the river. A few minutes served to determine the direction of its sluggish current. All observation confirmed the idea that it was the Long Prairie river yet we were now lost to know whether we were above or below the agency. In our anxiety to solve this question we started down the river but had not gone far when we were

¹⁹ The head waters of the Long Prairie River are in Lake Carlos, but it is hardly possible that Densmore and Iddings had gone that far south. The lake mentioned is probably one of the many lakes in the southeastern part of Otter Tail County or the northeastern part of Douglas, possibly Lake Irene. From here they doubtless went southeast until they reached the river.

obliged to stop and prepare for the night again. This operation occupied some time after dark. At the same time we were both deeply absorbed in the one idea, our condition & prospects of where we were, exchanging as we came near each other in our "dark work" some thought or some important fact working strongly upon our minds as they recounted the last few days' journey.

Three pair of snowshoes were discovered hanging in a tree near our fire. Eager to catch a glimpse of anything which bespoke the white man's hand we strove to think some explorer had here left his snowshoes and gone on either in a canoe by river or by land as we had done. But any conclusion to the effect that a civilized hand had placed them there was unsatisfactory and we unanimously attributed to the red man his just works, confident that if one of our own race had been so unfortunate as to visit the place we were now in he would have made speedy preparations to remove to some more genial scene.

After the usual time spent in gathering wood & kindling a fire we arranged ourselves "*a la cuisinier du bois*" and prepared for supper, each, one of his two remaining rations, rations to which a boston cracker & half a small herring would be a feast. We also had a brew of tea which by the way was very gratefully accepted, though made in a gill can & sipped from an half gill cup, our only cooking and table ware.

For a whole hour we hung round the camp fire, during the most of which time we had in question our route for the morrow; the more we talked over the matter the more firmly was the idea fixed in our minds that our route was to follow down the stream.

Sleep was sweet that night for we were wearied; well that it was so for the following morning the ground was covered with snow and snow was still falling. You may be able to picture in your own mind our condition & thoughts at that time; we had consumed the last remnant of food from our packs & made them up ready for the day's journey. Weapons we had none except a small hand axe, nor fire-arm, nor knife nor fishing implements we had none. We were in solitude & alone, we knew not where, save that the stream was before us, the wilder-

ness all about us, the snow falling noiselessly, silence, Sunday morning.

We could make but one resolve & that was to travel constantly & as fast as our condition would permit down the river.

The prickly ash & brush bordering the stream foretold the character of the work we had to do; branches of the main river too wide for us to leap across, we waded; to shorten the distance we had to travel we waded through the overflowed marshes.

Thus with the varied forms of wood & water to oppose and famishing bodies to support we contended though feebly for our way.

To be thus situated was far from being desirable, but should we by any means become separated one from the other, one or both, I felt, might surely perish, and to prevent this further addition to our miseries I allowed Iddings to go in advance & followed him, keeping his tracks.

He kept in advance some distance until about 10⁰⁰ A. M. when I came up with him near the river bank; he was engaged tying his pack & soon related his adventure. He discovered an eagle quietly devouring a fish upon a rock by the water side & creeping cautiously up near the bird frightened him away and secured the prize. The fish weighed perhaps ten ounces, and Iddings secured it carefully as though it had been a thing of fabulous value.

About an hour afterward we were brought to a halt by a very deep, wide & sluggish stream, a branch of the main river; after much searching for a place to ford we turned about and forded the main stream at some rapids. At the junction of these two streams the general course of the river which had been to the N.E by E becomes quite due south for nearly two miles, running through a kind of willow prairie.

Beyond this we were again "blockaded" by another deep & muddy stream coming from the South west, too wide to leap across, mud bottom of unknown depth. We followed up the right bank a mile or more & finally crossed by means of a bridge of tamarac poles laid from bank to bank. Until this we had not felt our growing weakness, though we travelled slowly & not without considerable exertion; to fell the small trees & place them across the stream was a rigid test of our muscular powers.

Beyond this stream, thickets & swamps & marshes occurred quite regularly with now & then, but far between, little nooks of prairie a few rods across.

Midday found us plodding onward, the snow still falling, our tattered garments leaving mementoes of our journey upon every thorn, while the river, seemingly to warn us that we had no garments though ragged even to spare, bore upon its bosom the first trophies of winter, large flakes of anchor ice.

Frequently in crossing the little prairies we would find rose buds and seldom thorn apples and haw berries of all of which we ate as we desired.

During the afternoon we came to a small cranberry marsh; the snow had not yet covered the vines, so with our bare hands we plucked the frozen rubies and ate of them until hands & feet cried out with pain at the cold work & prudence started us onward again.

Evening came, Sunday evening & with it a fog which with the darkness made the evening gloomy. Still we kept our course along the river occasionally leaving its bank for a few minutes but to return again & follow. About nine o'clock we made a halt where the river ran close by some timber.

Here our energies were put to the test again to collect material sufficiently dry to start a fire; having found a large tree which had fallen down we collected our indifferent fuel about it & after repeated efforts succeeded in getting a wet, smouldering fire with but little heat.

Eleven by the watch found us a little refreshed by the heat & rest but weary & emaciated, weary for rest & emaciate beyond the desire for food even had we any. We made the usual couch of brush & grass before the fire & passed the night watching & sleeping by turns.

Morning discovered to us our position, encamped on a low knoll of hard wood timber & still surrounded on all sides by the wilderness of poplar jungles, tamarac swamps, huge birches & varieties of hard wood. The air still hung with snowy clouds illly promising for the day & coldly bidding us to be active or perhaps perish. Hope never ceased with us & we engaged cheerfully in our morning task "to wit" patching & tying up our

clothing, making up our packs & dressing & cooking "the fish," the only morsel of food we had tasted for twenty-four hours and though scant & but a mere fragment it was no mockery.

We now seemed to take a more sensible view than ever of our "predicament." I had noticed Iddings closely since the yesterday morning & thought a marked change was working upon him; he spoke seldom, indeed we exchanged but few words during the day & then only to decide upon some choice of a path. He too I found had been paying me the same vacant though not disinterested compliment and I was somewhat startled at one time on looking up to find him gazing intently upon my features. While recounting our adventure some time afterward I referred him to that morning & he said he was in fact becoming alarmed at the condition we were in.

But we did not linger long around so uncongenial a camp fire; we left it smouldering and smoking on the bleak, dismal knoll, believing that the mortal who might ever visit that place in his wanderings would say "Whoso that was here was here but for a night."

The snow was now nearly four inches in depth, sufficient to conceal the slippery sticks and roots beneath and every unwary step either brought us prostrate or sent us headlong our packs flying in one direction, our feet in another. Intent upon getting hold of something to eat we made divers onslaughts upon ground mice and squirrels. At one time we had both thrown off our packs and commenced digging after one of the aforesaid quadrupeds; Iddings was sure he saw him run into the hole, but we were not successful in capturing the fellow. Pheasants, unaccustomed to the sight of man would allow us to approach them near enough to throw a club but all our attempts to capture game were fruitless & we soon relapsed into our quiet mode Iddings taking the lead in preference to following.

Thus we continued until about eleven oclock when he sent up a shout which made the wilderness ring & echo again. I soon came up with him & found him opening his pack as he had done the day before. By his side lay a *rabbit* which had been killed but a short time since by some beast of prey; its heart had been eaten out and the blood drank, otherwise it was as nice as it would have been, right from johnny's game-bag.

Think you that two famished men would spurn such a prize, just from dame nature's stalls & prepared for market by one of her daintiest caterers (a timber wolf, no doubt)?

We did not hesitate a moment for whim or prejudice, but expressed our heartfelt gratitude for the prize—manna as it was—and believed that now our journey would terminate with success; we certainly could not be more than another day's travel from Long Prairie.

And we did succeed. At three oclock in the afternoon we reached the point on the river where we had crossed it in making our reconnoissance for a wagon route a month before.

Our trials were now at an end, though it was twelve miles yet to the prairie, to know where we were with reference to that place inspired courage we had long been strangers to.

At ten oclock we roused the inmates of the barricaded house at the prairie & were bade thrice thrice welcome.



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